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SUBJECT: KUWAIT MEDIA ELECTION COVERAGE JUNE 8-14: NEWSPAPER JOINS
CHORUS AGAINST CORRUPTION

REF: KUWAIT 2152

¶1. Summary: Corruption and alleged vote-buying held sway in the media this week as the June 29 elections draw nearer. One Arabic-language daily joined the fray by launching its own anti-vote-buying campaign with front-page banners and by setting up a hotline for the public to report corruption. Reform, corruption and women continue to be the three leading election themes reported in all the media. The new liberal satellite channel "We Want It Alliance" made its debut after being initially blocked. End summary.

Newspaper Launches Anti-corruption Campaign

¶2. One of Kuwait's leading Arabic-language dailies, "Al-Watan," this week joined the growing voices against corruption in the elections process by launching a campaign to combat vote-buying. The announcement came in the June 12 edition with a front-page banner reading, "Let Us Say with One Voice: Kuwait Is Not for Sale," followed by the subhead, "Al-Watan Launches Its Campaign for Combating Vote-Buying." With this initiative the paper took a clear stance on this key campaign issue. The front page also contained an un-attributed editorial that was likely written by the Editor-in-Chief. In it the paper promised to fight bribery and financial embezzlement during the election noting that "bribes can come in different kinds of forms, not just money." The paper then appealed to the readers as patriotic citizens to reject such bribes. The public was invited to report incidents of vote-buying by telephoning the paper's hotline dedicated to the anti-corruption campaign. The next day "Al-Watan" reported on its front page great success on its first day of the campaign. It said that many calls had come into the hotline recounting incidents of candidates offering cash rewards and other benefits in exchange for votes.

¶3. In addition to corruption and vote-buying, women and elections as well as the fate of electoral constituency redistricting also remained hot topics among the candidates and in the media. The newspapers continued to dedicate large and prominent space to the role of women voters and candidates in the election and in the new Parliament. "Fadia Al-Saad Demands 'Quota' for Women: I Am Happy That Women Candidates in Outlying Areas Have Broken the Barriers," "Al-Rai Al-Aam," front page, June 11, and "Women's Vote Is the Tsunami of Elections," "Al-Qabas," pg. 25, June 11, illustrate the

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continued focus on the topic. The headline "Al-Mislim: Corruption Has Reached an Alarming Level," pg. 30, "Al-Qabas," June 13, demonstrates the continued press focus on corruption.

Local Issues Begin to Emerge in Media

¶4. Some local issues are beginning to emerge in the media among the daily clamor on vote-buying, corruption and women. Both sides of the issue of education, for example, were reported by "Al-Watan" on June 13. In two separate articles, the paper reported the position of the candidate Jamal Al-Kandari who argued that the national education system should be reformed in order to defend traditional Kuwaiti society, which is conservative by nature. On another page, the paper reported the stance of an unnamed woman candidate who stated at a seminar that the educational system should be reformed so that Kuwait could catch up to the rest of the modern world.

Television Increases Coverage of Election Issues

¶5. In a departure from its normally lackluster coverage of election issues, the public TV news station KTV1 on June 12 explored the topic of women and elections on its weekly program "Fit for Publication." The show adhered to the public media's policy of not interviewing candidates. However, it did feature interviews with an academic, the Undersecretary of Higher Education, and the Minister of Information. In her comments, the Undersecretary stressed that regardless of the outcome of the elections, the importance of this historical event for women, the ability to run and vote, should not be marginalized. The Minister of Information promised that public TV would cover election night in a neutral manner and that the public could expect to see a different kind of election coverage with easy-to-use graphics and charts. The private TV station Al-Rai continued daily coverage on its news broadcasts of election issues and candidate platforms. On its June 13 nightly news it reported that the top issues being discussed at election headquarters are corruption, redistricting and women's issues. The Satellite TV channel "The Parliament Dome" is airing near-continuous daily programming with a conservative leaning. After being initially

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blocked by the Minister of Information (see reftel), the liberal satellite channel "We Want It Alliance" debuted on another signal. News of the channel's successful airing filled blog sites, which posted the satellite frequency.

Polling Gives Flavor of Public Opinion

¶6. Two polls, one from the print media and one from broadcast, gave a flavor of public opinion on two hot election topics - vote-buying and outside influence on women's voting. "Al-Watan" daily newspaper reported in its June 14 edition that in answer to the question "Would you sell your vote," 74 percent said no and 26 percent said yes. Al-Rai TV conducted a poll on the question "Do men have influence on a woman's vote?" The percentage responding yes was 76 percent while 24 percent said no.

Internet and Blogs Keep Pace

¶7. Blog sites were busy posting comments from the public on election issues. The hot topics on the Internet mirrored those in the mainstream media. One blogger, however, criticized the mainstream media, in this case the daily newspaper "Al-Rai Al-Aam." He or she sent an email to other bloggers containing a link to a photograph of a campaign event that appeared in the paper. The blogger pointed out that on close inspection the audience members were clearly duplicated in the photo in order to make attendance at the rally seem larger than it was. The author accused the paper of "meddling" and "fabricating" things for its own benefit, by making it seem that the candidate's event was more popular than it really was. When the satellite channel "We Want It Alliance" finally made its debut this week, the blog sites were busy posting the satellite frequency where it could be found. The channel's debut was announced enthusiastically on many sites, many of which accused the government of "trying to ban our channel" (see reftel). Finally, one candidate for the second district launched his own blog site in

order to talk to voters .

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